

By John Fritze, The Baltimore Sun

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Maryland Democrats continued to ramp up pressure on House GOP leaders Wednesday over a stalled effort to extend a payroll tax cut that benefits as many as 2.6 million wage earners in the state.

With days left before the 2 percentage point payroll tax cut expires, Washington is once more languishing in impasse. House Republicans want to continue negotiations on a one-year extension of the cut. Democrats are calling on House GOP leaders to vote on a two-month extension the Senate passed over the weekend -- a bill all but seven Senate Republicans supported.

House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer tried to introduce the Senate bill Wednesday but was gavelled down as the House adjourned for the day. "We regret, Mr. Speaker, that you have walked off the platform without addressing the issue of critical importance to this country," Hoyer could be heard telling the empty chamber.

The House voted 229-193 on Tuesday to set up a conference committee with the Senate to resolve differences over the extension. Maryland's lawmakers voted on party lines on that parliamentary move -- it was not a vote on the legislation itself -- with the state's two Republicans in favor and all six Democrats opposed.

"The reason they didn't allow a vote [on the bill] is they knew that it would pass in the House," Rep. Chris Van Hollen said in a conference call Wednesday. "What you have going on here is not a fight between Republicans and Democrats. What you have going on here is fight between the Republican right and the Republican far right."

House Speaker John Boehner is also under pressure from within his own party. Some Senate

Republicans have criticized the House while others have tellingly declined to jump to its defense. The conservative *Wall Street Journal* editorial board wrote Wednesday that the GOP had inadvertently given President Barack Obama the political upper hand on the tax issue.

But a group of conservative Republicans, many of them first-term lawmakers, are pushing back against the two-month extension, arguing it would create uncertainty because the extension would have to be renegotiated once more in February. Rep. Andy Harris is one of the members who wants a longer extension worked out now.

“Now is not the time to play petty partisan games while 160 million Americans are on the hook for a tax increase because of the Senate’s desire not to return to Washington from its holiday vacation,” the Baltimore County Republican said in a statement.

Rank-and-file lawmakers in both chambers have gone home for the holidays. Obama remains in Washington, though his family is on vacation in Hawaii.